Body Image and Self Esteem

Lionel Hartley

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Your Notes

Abstract

Body image is how we think and feel about our bodies.

Body image is important because a positive body image is linked to better self-esteem, self-acceptance, and mental well-being, while a negative one can lead to serious issues like anxiety, depression, eating disorders or suicide.

Developing a healthy body image involves appreciating our body for what it can do and focusing on our overall well-being, rather than just physical appearance.

— Lionel Hartley

Your Notes

Introduction

The way we see our body is our *perceptual body image*. This is not always a accurate representation of how we actually look.

The way we think about our body is our *cognitive body image*. This can lead to preoccupation with body shape and weight.

The way we feel about our body is our *affective body image*. Feelings may include happiness, resignation, ambivalence or disgust, but are often summarised as the amount of contentment or discontent that we feel about our shape, weight and individual body parts.

The acted-out behaviours we engage in as a result of our body image form our *behavioural body image*.

When we are discontented with the way we look, we may isolate ourselves or resort to

unhealthy behaviours as a means to change our appearance.

A positive body image boosts and enhances self-esteem and self-acceptance, making us more resilient to negative messages about our appearance.

A positive body image promotes a healthy relationship with our body because it encourages us to appreciate what our body can do, leading to healthier habits like balanced eating and enjoyable physical activity.

A positive body image protects against mental health issues, eating disorders and other conditions like anxiety and depression.

On the other hand, a negative body image contributes to mental health problems.

A negative body image is associated with low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and in severe cases, can lead to eating disorders like anorexia or bulimia.

A negative body image can lead to social

isolation because feelings of self-consciousness can cause us to avoid social interactions, leading to isolation and loneliness.

If we have been mistreated, bullied or taunted in the past because of some aspect of our appearance, we can end up continuing to feel discontented with ourselves rather than placing the blame where it really lies - with those who acted in such a cruel way.

Similarly, aspects of our appearance can remind us of unhappy times. For example, if we have been through a long period of loneliness, we may well wear a habitually sorrowful or closed expression (Proverbs 15:13, "A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.")

If we then label ourselves as unattractive, we may then not give ourselves the chance of replacing the old unhappy experiences with new positive ones.

Family features (the shape of our nose, the colour of hair, etc.) may bring to mind others in the family with whom we have had difficult

relationships.

A negative body image results in unhealthy behaviours, such as compulsive exercise or unhealthy eating patterns, in an effort to change our body.

The Avon Counselling Clinic, based at the Christchurch Public Hospital provides a free counselling service.

This book is provided as an adjunct to counselling to help us to protect, promote, and preserve a healthy body image.

In order to cater for different groups, and keep each chapter as an individual unit, there may be some duplication of content from chapter to chapter.

Chapter 1: Women and Body Image

Our body image is how we perceive, think and feel about our body. This may have no bearing at all on our actual appearance. For instance, it is common in Western countries for women to believe they are larger and fatter than they really are. Only one in five women are content with their body weight. Nearly half of all normal weight women overestimate their size and shape.

There is a perception that women in Western cultures tend to gain status and value through their appearance, whereas men gain their status and value through physical strength, wealth and power or prestige.

A distorted body image can lead to self-destructive behaviour like dieting or binge eating. Approximately nine out of 10 young

New Zealand women have dieted at least once in their lives.

A poor body image can promote an unhealthy lifestyle leading to self-destructive behaviour. The urge to diet or use other potentially dangerous weight loss methods (such as fasting, smoking or laxatives) is almost always prompted by feeling unhappy with body shape or size.

It is well documented that even 'moderate' dieting increases the risk of developing an eating disorder among girls. If a woman feels self-conscious about her appearance, she may avoid exercising because it might mean exposing her body shape to the public eye. Alternatively, she might over exercise in a bid to lose weight quickly.

Some studies indicate that a young woman's body image is the single largest influence on her self-esteem. If she thinks she looks unattractive or fat, her self-confidence drops and this can impact on other areas of her life.

Negative body image has a range of causes.

Some of the factors that contribute to a negative body image include being teased about appearance in childhood, growing up with dieting parents, or one who was unhappy with their body shape, a cultural tendency to judge people by their appearance and peer pressure among teenage girls to be slim, go on diets and compare themselves with others.

Other factors include media and advertising images promoting thinness/slimness as the ideal, a tendency in women's media (such as popular weekly magazines) to push fad diets or weight loss programs and well-meaning public health campaigns that urge people to lose weight.

A negative body image develops over the course of our life, so although change is possible, altering it can take time and effort.

Suggestions for improving our body image involve firstly reflecting on our experiences and trying to unravel the development of our body image from childhood. Your counsellor at The Avon Counselling Clinic can help you with this.

Talk about feelings and experiences with

other women who have similar concerns.

Make a agreement with yourself to treat your body with respect, which includes giving it enough food and rest.

Give yourself a holiday from women's magazines and the mass media for a while.

Try some form of physical activity purely for the fun of it, not as a means of weight loss.

Stop weighing yourself, or at least do it less frequently. I suggest (for example) on the 20th. of each month ONLY.

Change your goal from weight control to improving your overall health.

Be informed by reading up on body image issues. This book is a good start.

The Avon Counselling Clinic, based at the Christchurch Public Hospital provides free counselling service to help people to protect, promote, and preserve a healthy body image.

Chapter 2:
Men and Body Image

For men, our body image is what we think we look like. This may have little to do with our actual appearance. Around one in four New Zealand men within a healthy weight range believe themselves to be fat, while 17 per cent of men are on some weight loss regime at any given time.

Men also worry about being muscular. A desire to fit the media portrayed ideal masculine image of lean muscularity means that over-exercising and the use of dangerous, often untested and illegal muscle-enhancing drugs are on the rise.

It's estimated that about 45 per cent of Western men are unhappy with their bodies to some degree, compared with only 15 per cent some 25 years ago. Research suggests that

models, dancers, athletes and men who consider themselves to be homosexual may be particularly vulnerable to poor body image or feeling insecure about their bodies. This is because they are more likely to be in situations where they may be judged (or believe they will be judged) according to their appearance.

A negative body image encourages a range of self-destructive behaviours. For example fad dieting - around 17 per cent of men are dieting at any given time. Most of those diets are not always nutritionally sound.

A negative body image encourages eating disorders. Around one in four people with anorexia nervosa is now male.

A negative body image encourages exercise dependence. Around 20 per cent of regular exercisers (approximately five per cent of the population) may be addicted to exercise, either psychologically or physically.

A negative body image encourages drug abuse, as around three per cent of New Zealand teenage boys use muscle-enhancing

drugs.

Some of the factors that may contribute to a negative body image include bullying and/or teasing in childhood and adolescence (being called too thin, too weak or too fat), peer pressure among teenage boys to be physically 'tough' and 'strong', a cultural tendency to judge people on their appearance, the emphasis on male sports players as role models for boys, advertising campaigns and media coverage featuring 'idealised' male images, promotion by society of the 'ideal' man as always being strong, lean and muscular and well-meaning public health campaigns that urge people to lose weight.

Most experts believe the real figures on eating and exercise disorders among New Zealand men could be much higher than previously thought. Men are less likely than women to seek medical help for any type of condition. Since worrying about weight, eating behaviours and body shape has sometimes been seen as a 'female' problem, men may be less likely to ask for help.

The Avon Counselling Clinic, based at the Christchurch Public Hospital provides free counselling service to help people to protect, promote, and preserve a healthy body image.

Chapter 3: Young People and Body Image

Body image is not about what we look like, but rather how you **feel** and **think** about our body. We are all different and celebrating and embracing our differences is really important because there is no right or wrong way to look.

Beauty and appearance ideals exist in all societies and none are helpful to a healthy self-esteem.

Society's ideals don't encourage uniqueness but unrealistically suggest that everyone should and could look a certain way. Spending time, money and energy on changing or trying to change your appearance is exhausting and unhelpful in the long run.

You are so much more than your

appearance and you have the power to change the way you see, think and feel about how you look.

Our weight, body shape, muscles, hair or skin colour, complexion, height, social standing, educational achievements, our taste in clothing does not define who we really are. Appearance does not determine our worth.

Avoid making unhelpful comparisons because the more we compare our appearance to siblings, friends, film stars, sporting personalities or anyone, the more unhappy we'll feel.

Our body might not look exactly as we'd like, but it does so many amazing things for us. Speaking kindly, finding exercise and activities that you love, eating sensibly and taking time out to rest, demonstrates body respect.

Body bullying and food shaming is never ok. Speak kindly to yourself and your friends - if you wouldn't say it to a friend, avoid saying it to yourself.

Words can build people up or tear them down. Use your words carefully (to yourself and to others).

Have fun with your appearance but don't let it rule your life. It's healthy to take pride in your appearance and have fun with fashion and styling (if that's what interests you), but obsessing and worrying about how you look is not good for anyone.

Surround yourself with people who accept you as you are. Changing your appearance to fit in won't make you a better, nicer, more lovely and lovable person.

If a person or group doesn't like you for who you are, then it's time to find some new people to spend time with. You are enough just as you are.

If your body image is getting you down or you are worried about a friend, talking helps. The Avon Counselling Clinic, based at the Christchurch Public Hospital provides free counselling service to help people to protect, promote, and preserve a healthy body image.

Behaviours that include tobacco, recklessness and alcohol have a detrimental effect on our physical appearance as well as what these substances and actions do in destroying us internally.

Chapter 4: Parenting and Body Image

There are many ways that parents can foster positive body image and strong self-esteem in their children. If you are at all concerned about your child's body image, self-esteem or eating behaviours, consult with your doctor or dietitian for information and referral.

Your body image is how we think and feel about our body, and what we imagine that it looks like. This may have nothing to do with our actual appearance. Poor body image can have a range of negative effects, including disordered eating, depression, anxiety and low self-esteem.

Relationships and activity choices can be seriously affected by low self-esteem.

Feeling embarrassed about physical

appearance can cause some children to stop exercising, because they don't want other people to see their bodies. A sedentary lifestyle leads to a host of health problems including an increased risk of obesity.

The most influential role model in your child's life is you. Parents can encourage their children to feel good about themselves by showing them how it's done.

For example, children learn eating behaviours from their parents, so make sure you include plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables, protein foods, low-fat dairy products and unprocessed cereals in the family's diet. Go easy on takeaway, fried foods and sugary snacks.

Neither crash diet nor encourage your child to crash diet because studies show that many young people mistakenly believe that crash dieting is a harmless and effective way to lose weight. Learn about the dangers and then talk to your child about the risks of crash dieting.

Accept your own body size and shape.

Don't complain about 'ugly' body parts or, at least, don't share your opinions with your child.

Accept other people's body sizes and shapes. If you put a lot of emphasis on physical

Appearances, your child will too. Instead, try to talk to your child about all the different aspects that make up a person, such as personality, skills and outlook on life.

Exercise regularly and plan to have at least one family activity per week that involves some kind of exercise; for example, bush-walking, gardening, playing backyard cricket, going for a walk or swimming. Get them into the activity habit. Encourage your child from an early age to exercise right along with you. For example, take little ones for strolls in the pram. Once they're old enough, encourage them to walk part of the way.

Emphasise fitness, health and enjoyment as the motivations for exercise, rather than weight loss or weight management. Call it "activity" rather than "exercise".

Try to find a team sport they enjoy. Team sports encourage camaraderie, teamwork, mild competition and mastery of physical skills. A child who feels passionate about their sport is more likely to continue playing into adulthood.

Be cautious of sports that are strongly competitive or have a strong emphasis on thinness - for example, gymnastics and ballet. Vulnerable children may feel pressured to lose weight to participate in these activities. Help them feel confident about themselves.

Studies show that a person who appreciates what their body can do, rather than what it looks like, feels good about their body and tends to have higher self-esteem.

A strong sense of identity and self-worth are crucial to your child's self-esteem.

We can help them when we encourage problem solving, expression of opinions and individuality.

Teach your child various healthy coping strategies to help them deal with life's

challenges.

Allow them to say 'no' if they feel they have been mistreated.

Listen to their concerns about body shape and appearance. Puberty, in particular, can be a worrying time. Reassure your child that their physical changes are normal and that everyone develops at different times and rates.

Never tease them about their weight, body shape or looks. Even seemingly friendly nicknames can be hurtful if they focus on some aspect of the child's appearance, Instead place value on their achievements, such as talents, skills and personality characteristics.

Make your child feel they have an important role in the family; for example, give them age-appropriate household tasks. Tell them what a valuable contribution they make to the running of the house.

Your child's school can be a positive environment that fosters healthy body image and self-esteem. Talk to your principal about

any concerns you may have.

Issues such as bullying and/or teasing about physical appearance is a known risk factor for poor body image.

Make sure your school has an effective anti-bullying policy. If you find out that your child is being teased, contact the principal immediately.

Peer pressure can contribute to poor body image if the peer group is concerned with physical appearance and slimness/thinness. Talk to the school about their body-image programmes (if they have any).

If you think your child is hanging out with a 'thin-is-in' crowd, try to arrange opportunities or them to mix with other children. Once again, team sports could be a valuable venue, since the emphasis is usually on how the person plays, not what they look like.

Self-conscious students may shy away from school sports because of the uniforms. If necessary, consult with your school on possible changes to make the sports uniforms less

revealing or figure-hugging.

Be critical of media messages and images that promote thinness, especially 'women's' weekly magazines. Encourage your child to question and challenge Western society's narrow and one-sided 'beauty ideal'.

You are the most influential role-model in your child's life, so lead by example.

Give your child opportunities to appreciate their body for what it can do, rather than what it looks like.

If you are at all concerned about your child's body image, self-esteem or eating behaviours, consult with your doctor or dietitian for information and referral.

The Avon Counselling Clinic, based at the Christchurch Public Hospital provides free counselling service to help people to protect, promote, and preserve a healthy body image.

Your Notes

Chapter 5: Ageing and Body Image

Aging typically manifests itself in a variety of physical and cognitive alterations and challenges that are not always easily accepted. Feeling discontented with these changes can also affect the mood and self-esteem of older people causing body image problems.

A focus or even an obsession with body image and appearance, while often associated with younger people, are not exclusive to youth. Though our appearance and our relationship with our bodies change as we age, we do not stop valuing our bodies, and body image concerns can remain.

Body image perception is a concept that should not be overlooked when dealing with the older adults. Body image during old age can

suffer distortions, since there is a negative view about aging in society, based on the false association of aging and incapacity and incompetence.

The chapters in this book pertaining to both women and men are not age-specific.

My personal recommendation for those in their senior years is to focus less on appearance and more on living a health lifestyle. I suggest a well-rounded diet, at least a pint-and-a-half of drinking water every day, moderate exercise, at least 10 minutes of direct sunlight daily, maintaining or creating social and spiritual connectedness, lots of fresh air and adequate rest/sleep. Behaviours that include tobacco, recklessness and alcohol have a detrimental effect on our physical appearance as well as what these substances and actions do in destroying us internally.

Body image perception is a concept that should not be overlooked when dealing with the older adults. Body image during old age can suffer distortions, since there is a negative view about aging in society, based on the false

association of aging and incapacity and incompetence.

Western societies and media promote youthful standards of beauty, which can lead to discontent in older adults as they experience natural age-related changes, such as wrinkles, thinning skin, and changes in body shape.

Aging brings unavoidable physical changes, including weaker muscles, stiffer tendons, and loss of height. These changes can shift a person's focus from a body's appearance to its functional ability, though for some, this can create tension with appearance goals.

Research indicates that older women are more likely than older men to experience negative body image, depression, and anxiety related to appearance. Older men generally report being less concerned with their appearance.

Significant life changes in later life, such as retirement, shifting family dynamics, and menopause, can affect mental well-being and body image.

Menopause for women and Andropause (Mid-life-Crises) for men are often signalled by body changes that society disapproves of (whether-or-not they are healthy and normal, including weight-gain, less-elastic skin (think wrinkles and flabby skin under arms), thinning hair, sagging body parts, changes in sleep and eating patterns, etc.)

Specifically, menopause can cause physical changes that conflict with expected beauty standards, leading to a poorer body image for some women.

Age-based discrimination and stereotypes can profoundly impact an older adult's psychological well-being and body image. Feeling marginalized or unseen by younger generations can reinforce negative self-perceptions.

A negative body image in old age can have serious consequences for overall health.

Body discontent is associated with psychological distress, anxiety, and depression in seniors.

For some, body image concerns can impact physical health and well-being. For example, some older adults may withdraw from social or physical activities due to discontent with their appearance.

Research shows that a negative body image is linked to lower self-esteem and a poorer quality of life.

Older adults can employ various coping strategies to help to protect against body image distress. Firstly by shifting the focus from external appearance to the body's functional strengths can foster a more positive body image. Secondly, placing less importance on external appearance and accepting age-related changes can protect against discontent. And thirdly, connecting with and appreciating the body in a attentive way can support healthier behaviours and a more positive self-image.

Your Notes

Chapter 6: Responses to Body Image

Everyone has a right to feel comfortable and confident in his or her skin, and we can take small actions in our daily lives to help foster a more accepting environment.

For example, it may be helpful to be mindful of how we speak about our bodies in casual conversations with friends and family. Consistently speaking about our bodies, or others' bodies, in ways that imply weight and youth are central to attractiveness and value may feel harmless in the moment, but can make us feel worse about our bodies in the long run. Instead, focusing more on the functionality of our body and the positive things it can do for us may help support and improve body image.

A good approach to building up our body

image is focusing on physical activity and healthy eating for their intrinsic benefits in terms of social connectedness and overall psychological and physiological well-being, rather than as a path to building muscles or losing weight.

If body image concerns are causing significant distress, it may be appropriate to seek out further support from a counselling service.

Chapter 7: The Biblical Body Image

King David the Psalmist wrote:

Psalm 139:14 "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

15) My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. [referring to the womb]

16) Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.

17) How precious also are thy thoughts unto

me, O God! how great is the sum of them!

18) If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee."

- Psalm 139:14-18

And Jesus of Nazareth, in His 'Sermon on the Mount' said,

Matthew 6:25) "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

26) Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27) Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

28) And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow;

they toil not, neither do they spin:

29) And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30) Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

31) Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32) (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33) But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

34) Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

- Matthew 6:25-34

The Apostle Paul compares the church (referring to it as the body of Christ) with the human body. I suggest that his observation (as recorded in the Holy Bible) is relevant to our discussion of body image.

This is what he said:

1 Corinthians 12:12) "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

13) For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

14) For the body is not one member, but many.

15) If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

16) And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

17) If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?

18) But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

19) And if they were all one member, where were the body?

20) But now are they many members, yet but one body.

21) And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

22) Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:

23) And those members of the body, which

we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.

24) For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked:

25) That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

26) And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it"

- 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

The bottom line is that it is unrealistic to aim to be completely contented with our bodies, but we can learn to be more accepting and daily enjoy our God-given life.

Chapter 8:
Bases
for Self Esteem

1. We have been created in God's Image - Genesis 1:26-28

26) "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

27) So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

28) And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the

fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

2. We are important to God and am known by Him - Psalms 139:1-6

6) "To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David. O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.

2) Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.

3) Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.

4) For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.

5) Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.

6) Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it."

3. God actively determined how we would look before we are born - Psalms 139:13-18

13) "For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. 14) I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

15) My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

16) Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.

17) How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!

18) If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee."

4. We are all important to God - Matthew 10:29-31

29) "Are not two sparrows sold for a

farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.

30) But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

31) Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows."

5. We are more valuable than His Son - John 3:16

16) "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

We are a work in progress and God, who doesn't make mistakes nor anything worthless, has not finished with us yet - Ephesians 2:10

10) "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

Chapter 9:
Conclusions and Actions

A few weeks ago I had an accident moving a caravan by hand and I slid under the drawbar impacting all my top teeth. I had surgery and during the procedure a skilled dental surgeon immediately replaced the broken teeth with a realistic denture.

For several days I was very conscious of the change in my appearance, although looking in the mirror I could see no noticeable change. My teeth looked normal, my speech was unchanged and my moustache covered any bruising on my upper lip.

Never-the-less I imagined that everyone who saw me could tell something was different, maybe even something wrong with me.

I hesitatingly asked a couple of trusted

colleagues if they could see anything different about my appearance and they asked if I had had a haircut or maybe I was wearing something they hadn't seen me wear before.

When I drew their attention to my teeth, they honestly admitted that they had not noticed. This reinforced the theory that body image can be best understood as a person's attitude towards and their perception of their body.

Attitudes are powerful, and may include positive and negative beliefs, which are strongly influenced by our experiences (e.g. family, friends, media, things around us).

Think about factors that may have influenced your body image. How did your attitudes and perceptions develop? Have they changed over time? What would help you to start creating a more positive image now?

Use the following questions to help you understand how you feel about your body:

How do I talk to myself about my body?

What do I see when I look in the mirror?

How do I treat my body?

Would others agree with my attitude?

How do I experience others talking about and treating my body?

Our physical perception of our body (the image we see in the mirror) is never a correct representation of how we look.

Some people view themselves as overweight when they are underweight, or see particular body parts as being defective even though these perceived defects are not visible to others.

Unfortunately, it is not unusual for people to express discontent with their bodies.

However, in some individuals, body discontent can lead to debilitating consequences, such as in individuals with eating disorders and body dysmorphic disorder.

We need to accept our heritage as all bodies

are generally genetically wired to be a particular size and shape, and our body will fight to maintain this. Forcing our body to change is likely to come at a considerable cost and have undesirable consequences:

Emotional consequences - anxiety, depression, anger or frequently "feeling fat"

Cognitive consequences - body discontent, strong negative beliefs, preoccupation with weight, shape or the appearance of particular body parts, suicidal thoughts

Behavioural consequences - severe dietary restrictions, repeated fad dieting, appearance-driven exercise, seeking surgery, suicide

Body scrutiny consequences - frequent weight checks, mirror checking, comparing your body to the bodies of others

Compensatory consequences - wearing baggy clothes, avoiding situations where the body is exposed (e.g. sexual intimacy, swimming or skin-cancer checks), isolation and social avoidance, getting tattoos to exaggerate a

particular body part to draw attention away from a less desirable body part and an undue importance being placed on appearance that may have become the most important aspect of life.

Finally:

He was considered so slow in thinking, his father publicly wondered whether this young man could ever get a reasonable job in life. He was hyperactive and was dead last entering the school at Harrow. He twice failed college entrance exams. His name is Winston Churchill

One teacher called him "addled". His father called him a "dunce." His headmasters claimed that he "would never make a success of anything." His name is Thomas Edison

His parents felt he was mentally unstable because he spoke haltingly up to the age of nine. He could hardly hold a job. One teacher even urged him to drop out of high school, so poorly did he perform. His name is Albert Einstein

He could hardly read and did poorly in English and grammar. He was most known for making his friends tiny waterwheels and steam engines. His name is Henry Ford

He was nicknamed "Dopey" at primary school because of his tendency to daydream rather than concentrate.

He was considered a loner because although he was friendly to all and had no enemies, neither did he have any friends but preferred to read books instead.

He was considered a loser because he freely gave away anything he owned that anyone asked for. His teacher's said he would never amount to anything.

However within a year of leaving high school he was the manager of a commercial warehouse and, after extensive studies and changing careers he is now the director and principal counsellor at a Public Hospital Counselling Clinic (and is the author of this book).

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